

## UNDP AFGHANISTAN MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS OF 2008 OUTCOME V EVALUATION

*This document presents in brief the response of the UNDP Afghanistan Senior Management Team to the recommendations made by the report of the CPAP Outcome Evaluation, which took place in July and August 2008. This document does not respond to the findings of the report, which are provided separately.*

### 1. Portfolio Rationalization

Evaluation Recommendation: There are far too many projects in the portfolio—given the number of staff members available to the UNDP Afghanistan Country Office. Too often there are projects in the same generic thematic area that should not exist as separate entities, but as coherent components of a holistic single intervention.

Management Response: **Agree:** The management supports the consolidation of similar projects under one management structure. In the fourth quarter of 2008, a rationalization of projects under a reduced number of award codes took place. In the first quarter of 2009, the three justice projects are being reformulated into a single programme.

### 2. Log frame Rationalization

Evaluation Recommendation: UNDP Afghanistan Country Office project results frameworks are a study in the very real link between incomplete and inadequate project formulation, design and approvals processes, and the incomplete nature of development work that such processes lead to. If an output cannot be measured, it should not be attempted. If the metrics for measurement are not obvious, development actors have a responsibility to develop them, collect the relevant data and then use it. However ill defined activities and outputs, with no defined performance criteria and vague definitions of what constitutes accomplishment is a recipe for incomplete development.

Management Response: **Partially Agree:** Management agrees that results frameworks must be well defined and adhere to the “SMART” principles; the application of strong scientific rigor required in the pursuit of a robust, objective and independent methodology, is to be welcomed. In the overall analysis, accepting that there might be inherent deficiencies or weaknesses in the CPAP as pointed out by the evaluation, we would also have appreciated the introduction of stakeholder insights and wisdom to complement the exacting evidence in arriving at a ‘failed’ grade. In this regard, specifically, further elaboration is required in the evaluation on how and why the measurability indicators, for example in table 6, fail the process of evaluation. There was been no attempt by the evaluation to seek to use those indicators to generate or corroborate evidence one way or the other. These are, nevertheless, timely lessons for the formulation of the successor CPAP and its results framework.

### **3. Staff Function Rationalization**

**Evaluation Recommendation:** The twin functions of a regular donor or UNDP office are being fulfilled by only one set of staff members — the two functions being operational and programme management, and technical development expertise. The UNDP Afghanistan Country Office has one in-house technical specialist (or advisor), who is almost entirely dedicated to servicing corporate needs (M&E). Of the most pressing issues in Afghanistan, none are addressed by the UNDP at an agency level.

**Management Response:** **Agree:** During the course of the current CPD period a trend was experienced whereby day-to-day operational programme and project management became increasingly the responsibility of programme staff (programme officers, ACDs and DCDs). In the fourth quarter of 2008, this trend was reversed by streamlining the job descriptions of programme staff to remove their operational support functions (such as Atlas requisition approval duties) and devolving a greater degree of operational authority to projects. In this way, the management intends to bolster the substantive policy support, monitoring and evaluation, and programme assurance value added of programme clusters.

In addition, the management recognizes the need for increased high-quality analytical and policy development capacity in the Country Office. This was also a key finding of the recent MCT report. A new policy development project has been designed to provide Government interlocutors with expert policy support on demand. Management will also consider then engagement of some or all of the senior support positions recommended by the MCT report, including an economist.

### **4. Investment in Capacity to Produce Credible Log Frames**

**Evaluation Recommendation:** The UNDP Afghanistan Country Office needs to invest in the skills of its programme staff to develop and monitor credible log frames. In making this investment, it is vital that a concurrent investment be made in project partners' staff, whether that is with government agencies or civil society.

**Management Response:** **Agree:** Management concurs that there is/was a need to increase the monitoring and evaluation capacity of the country office, and expects that this goal will be achieved at least in part by the measures discussed in the response to recommendation three. The evaluator's grasp of the role of projects in developing and maintaining strong monitoring and evaluation frameworks appears to be weak, as reporting is dealt with minimally. While we agree that the monitoring and evaluation capacity on implementing partners and beneficiaries is an important consideration, the context in which most UNDP projects work open means that this expectation may be unrealistic. This further underlines the need for in-house framework design and monitoring capacity in both projects and the Country Office.

### **5. Follow the Guidelines on Capacity**

**Evaluation Recommendation:** A full throttled UNDP capacity assessment of the UNDP Afghanistan Country Office is an urgent necessity. Both the Capacity Building Guideline and the Capacity Assessment Guidelines issued by UNDP HQ in NY offer clear and comprehensive solutions to the issues of both UNDP Country Office capacity constraints and the capacity challenges posed by a post-conflict rebuilding government, as is the case in Afghanistan.

**Management Response:** **Disagree:** As part of the MCT mission, a capacity assessment was conducted. S part of the findings of this mission, it was recommended that a Capacity

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Development expert be engaged. The Country Office is currently considering this proposal. With respect to the conditions specific to the post-conflict setting in Afghanistan, a BCPR mission visited UNDP Afghanistan in January 2009 to assess the Office's capacity to deal with the post-conflict and recovery aspects of the programme. The team is currently finalizing its recommendations for what assistance it may offer to the Office.

**6. Figure out what UNDP does well**

Evaluation Recommendation: UNDP cannot be the most capable agency in all sectors all the time. There are some areas in which it has clear competitive and comparative advantages, and some in which it does not. Conducting a competitive and comparative advantages assessment will enable the UNDP to make better decisions about project work that it takes on, and project work that it passes onto other multilateral mandates agencies (such as the ARTF for example).

Management Response: **Partially Agree:** The majority of UNDP delivery is in the area of central government capacity development support and democratic governance, which are without doubt areas of comparative advantage. In the case of large interventions, such as police support (LOTFA), support to sub-national governance (ASGP/IDLG), and livelihoods development (NABDP), UNDP also responds to needs expressed by coordination bodies and the Government of Afghanistan. In the context of a challenging and dynamic implementation environment, the concept of comparative advantage becomes something of a fluid market force. As such, while we strongly agree that self-knowledge and strategic prioritization is important, it is also extremely important to remain sufficiently flexible so as to be responsive to the needs of country. At the same time, we agree that excessive programmatic flexibility can lead to a dilution of the strategic value-added of UNDP as well as a loss of focus. A newly-developed resource mobilization and management strategy aims to establish a strong method for prioritizing the myriad resource needs amongst projects so as to ensure that UNDP is driving the agenda in its areas of comparative advantage, rather than having donors driving UNDP.

**7. Making Sure it Happens**

Evaluation Recommendation: The only realistic way that the currently configured UNDP Country Office will be able to undertake a rationalization of portfolio, and log frames, and an investment in the analysis necessary to improve internal efficiencies and effectiveness is through the dedication of a senior staff resource for the purpose. The UNDP Afghanistan Country Office will need to hire full-time programme strategy advisor, reporting to the Country Director. This position would undertake internal programming changes, and would fulfil the programme management oversight function.

Management Response: **Partially Agree:** The dedication of senior management to the consideration and implementation of strategic programmatic decisions is achieved in all or part through the rationalization of the programme/operations division of labour discussed in responses to recommendations three and four. Management oversight is the responsibility of a dedicated unit, which has since hired an additional international staff member. The need for rationalization of the programme is in many ways accepted, however management does not believe that an additional senior staff member is justifiable in this regard.

**8. Limit Short Term Fixes**

Evaluation Recommendation: **Partially Agree:** The UNDP Afghanistan Country Office should issue an immediate moratorium on the approval of any project proposal of less than 48 months, without a written certification from the Country Director, and ideally a

senior government official that a short intervention is a legitimate development response to whatever problem the proposal identifies and seeks to address.

Management Response: Management believes that the approval of project activities for time periods beyond their currently available funding results in a more rather than less piecemeal approach to addressing a need. Donor funding is rarely available for more than two years at a time in Afghanistan.

## **9. Limit Unrealistic Budget Formulations**

Evaluation Recommendation: The significant gap between Outcome 5 projects projected budgets and the money that was eventually available to the projects reflects either poor design skills, or poor persuasion of donors to finance interventions in the appropriate manner. One way to resolve this issue is to enforce a more rigorous internal process. For example, the UNDP Afghanistan Country Office could issue a moratorium on project approvals unless 75% of total budget identified in the project proposal is committed to in principle, by donors.

Management Response: **Disagree:** In the context of Afghanistan, it is not realistic to expect multi-year projects to mobilize sufficient resources to fund the full duration of the project from the outset; unfortunately donor predictability in Afghanistan is extremely low. UNDP has mitigated the risks associated with low predictability by phasing its interventions. We retain a strong degree of control by only approving annual workplans the activities for which are fully funded.

## **10. Project Documentation**

Evaluation Recommendations: There is no clearinghouse mechanism for the UNDP existing or closed project portfolio. The UNDP Afghanistan Country Office should therefore immediately establish a PDF and Word-based database for UNDP Afghanistan project portfolio, that enables a browser to track changes to a project document, changes in the financing and the original and current project documents and results frameworks.

Management Response: **Partially Agree:** The UNDP Afghanistan intranet plays this role but is not used with sufficient discipline. We agree that we must increase user buy in.